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ABSTRACT

Students majoring in advertising can benefit from a study of that field in its historical context because such study helps them to understand current practices and to foresee future developments. One model of teaching advertising history within a required course about advertising and society begins with some basic definitions of the advertising field, its scope and size, and its relation to marketing and societal processes. After this introductory period, the students brainstorm about areas of contemporary interest or concern in the advertising field, listing the topics according to such categories as law, management, media, organizations, and content. The teacher then presents course materials about the topics within a framework of communication, literacy, and mercantilism--the three basic concepts that are critical not only to advertising development but also to all historical development. The value of this course organization model is that it prepares students for a conceptual study of advertising history without overemphasizing the rote learning of names, dates, and events. (Source materials useful in the historical study of advertising are suggested.) (RL)

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HOW ADVERTISING HISTORY HELPS EXPLAIN CURRENT PRACTICES

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HOW ADVERTISING HISTORY HELPS EXPLAIN CURRENT PRACTICES

"Boring," "dull," "flunk" and "scary" were some of the words used by journalism students in a recent survey to describe their attitudes toward the study of history. Even a few words of the four-letter variety were expressed to emphasize their dislike for the subject area. In contrast, such traditionally difficult subjects as math, science, and foreign language received largely neutral or, at worst, passively negative descriptions.

This attitude of veiled or even outright hostility often greets the teacher of an Advertising and Contemporary Society class at the first mention that the course will devote a portion of its time to the study of the history of advertising. In addition to the psychological prejudice held by the student toward the study of history, the instructor must also overcome the student's inability to see how history can help him better understand contemporary advertising.

History has traditionally been taught on a names, date, and place basis. The main skill required by a student to pass many history courses is rote memorization. The student who can collect the greatest number of facts in his head -- significant or

insignificant -- and can retrieve them for an examination is the one who receives the best grade. Very few students can echo Theodore H. White's enthusiasm for his study of history: "A full dozen names and images of teachers remain engraved in my memory. All of them were bound by the conviction that history was, in essence, storytelling, and more art than science."[1]

If history is to be made both interesting and meaningful to the students it must be presented in such a way that they perceive the information as being pragmatically useful. Particularly in professional programs such as advertising students measure knowledge by how relevant it is to their future career. While teachers may truthfully be able to say to students, "Everything you learn will some day be important to you," students seldom take that long-range view about what they are learning today.

When students are both unable to see the relevance of history and dislike the study of the subject, the teacher, to be effective, must seek new ways to convey information that will be beneficial to the student. That goal, as it regards the history of advertising, is based on the premise that the advertising profession has a developmental record that must be both understood and appreciated.

Almost all of our collegues in news-editorial require a journalism history course for their majors. John Peter Zenger, Horace Greeley and Joseph Pultizer are names that are written in

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[1] Theodore H. White, "Growing Up in the Land of Promise." The Atlantic Monthly, Aug. 1978, p. 49.

neon. Dates such as 1704, the first newspaper in America; 1836, the first penny paper; and, 1851, the founding of the New York Times are carved in granite. And, places such as Pittsburgh, the first city west of the Alleghenies to have a newspaper; Worcester, Mass., the site of Isaiah Thomas's Massachusetts Spy; and, Charleston, S.C., the first city to have a woman newspaper editor, take on larger than life significance on the map.

This knowledge of history allows the fledgling reporter to understand where his profession came from, why it developed as it did, and possibly to understand where its future development might lead. It is probable that many journalism history teachers use the funnel method of education, i.e., drilling a hole in the students' head and then pouring in names, dates, and places. Never-the-less, some knowledge of the tradtiion of the profession will seep in -- and some is better than none.

The approach to the teaching of advertising history offered in this paper is not unique nor is it offered as a panacea. The method does seem to work. Some measure of success in the method can be noted by the fact that students in South Carolina's Advertising/ Public Relations and Society course[2], when faced with writing a term

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[2] The University of South Carolina major is in advertising/public relations -- a combination of the two fields. Specialities in advertising management, public relations, and advertising creativity are offered. The course also deals with public relations history in the same manner as advertising history.

paper on any facet of the field of interest to them, select history more than 50 percent of the time. Consumerism, creativity, research, media, etc. all receive less attention.

Our course, which is required of all majors in their sophomore year and is the prerequisite to all other courses in our program, begins with some basic definitions of the field, its scope and size, and its relation to the marketing and societal process. During those first two weeks, students are also required to read Advertising Age. After that introductory period, the class is asked to "brain-storm" areas of contemporary concern or interest in the field. After the list is compiled, the class briefly defines why the topics are important to a contemporary advertising practioner and groups them into related areas.

Then, and only then, are the students alerted to the fact they are going to begin the study of the history of our profession. At that point, some of the negative words used in the first paragraph of this paper are uttered sotto voce. However, there is a latent enthusiasm for understanding contemporary practice and with the promise that that is our goal, enthusiasm can be held. As opposed to the funnel method of education, this is the "take them to the top of the mountain" technique with a little bit of the "carrot and stick" method thrown in for insurance.

The blackboard brainstorming exercise is simply a method of creating participation in the education process for the student as well as showing them the end result of learning before they begin it. Class notes, previous to that exercise, have been arranged to form a series of lectures which will include the topics generated by the students as well as topics they may not have included. Presently, the lecture outline groups the topics into the following areas:

1. Legal
2. Management
3. Media
4. Organizations
5. Content

While it is possible to create additional divisions offering more finite definitions, it seems better to use a limited number of categories in order to help students more easily grasp the concepts. These divisions are artificial and other teachers might prefer their own arrangement. Basic definitions of these categories are:

1. Legal: local, state, and federal legislative actions; court decisions; administrative procedures and decisions.

2. Management: advertising departments of retailers and manufacturers; advertising agencies; media representatives; research.

3. Media: newspapers, magazines, radio, television, outdoor and other media; technology; content; audiences.

4. Organizations: AAF, AAAA, ANA, and other groups; NARB; ethics; self-regulation; consumerism.

5. Content: creativity -- copy, design, and art; production; types of advertisers and products.

Prior to exploring these areas three basic concepts are introduced to provide a framework to help the student maintain perspective over the long span of history. These concepts have been generally agreed upon by historians as being critical to advertising development:

1. Communications: the means by which messages are delivered to the public; includes everything from clay tables and criers to satellites and laser transmission.

2. Literacy: the number of people able to understand messages transmitted in a common language; results from the development of an educational system and other social and artistic advancements.

3. Mercantilism: the system by which goods and services are exchanged; encompasses manufacturing, specialization of job skills, transportation and political systems.

These three concepts can be considerably expanded beyond the brief definitions given above. While several authors, with slightly different terminology, use the same concepts in their study of advertising history, probably the best treatment of the subject is in Rotzoll's Advertising in Contemporary Society.[3]

People -- and particularly students -- do not normally retain material in a neat chronological order. Retention of such material requires an artificial method of learning -- rote memorization --

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[3] Kim B. Rotzoll, James E. Haefer, Charles H. Sandage, Advertising in a Contemporary Socitty. Columbus, Ohio: Grid, Inc., 1976. I first developed these concepts in a term paper in 1963 while a graduate student at the University of Illinois. Possibly, considering Rotzoll's extensive treatment of the subject in the 1970's, these concepts are part of the "Illinois philosophy" of advertising's development.

when we are really trying inculcate concepts and theories that can be applied to the student's understanding of current practices. It seems to be more efficient to help the student learn the period of time when an event took place rather than the exact date.

Therefore, in spite of the earlier admonition in this paper against names, dates and places, it is obvious that in ultimately organizing history in a logical framework these factors do play a role. However, by presenting material in coherent blocks or periods of time the student seems more able to grasp the impact of history without being burdened with unnecessary detail. Therefore, those names, dates, and places presented take on added significance and the student is able to retain them more easily.

The concepts of communication, literacy and mercantilism encompass all of the history the student has been exposed to since his first day in kindergarten. By relating these concepts to periods of time which have previously been internalized by the student, the learning process becomes coherent for the student of advertising history. The advertising material then becomes "layered" on top of previously learned information.

It is really unimportant to have the student recall for an examination that F. Wayland Ayer founded N.W. Ayer & Son on April 1, 1869. What is important for the student to know is (1) that the

agency was founded shortly after the Civil War, or (2) it was founded during the Period of Reconstruction. These two time frames are known by the student even before the first mention of advertising history. By building on previous knowledge the student is able to learn more rapidly and with greater relevance.

Possibly even more useful than the concept of "blocks" of time is the premise that was introduced in the introduction of this paper, i.e., how history can help us understand contemporary practices. Therefore, even more important than F. Wayland Ayer or 1869 is the impact N.W. Ayer & Son had on today's business: (1) the creation of the modern advertising agency (2) the separation of the agency from the media representative (3) the utilization of market research (4) the development of the open contract. All of these developments, and more, took place as a result of Ayer's efforts in 1869-81.

One of the major difficulties faced by many teachers of advertising history, if they chose to use the methods discussed in this paper, is that they are not really trained either in advertising history or world/American history. None of the dozen or so Ph.D. degree granting programs in Journalism/Communications in the U.S. offers a course in advertising history.[4]

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[4] Many do offer courses in journalism history on both the undergraduate and graduate level. However, those courses are almost exclusively oriented toward the newspaper field. Even if a student wants to pursue the topic on his own few journalism historians have any interest or expertise in the subject.

One excellent source of material, and the really only significant research conducted in the area, is Richard Pollay's bibliography of the history of American advertising.[5] Pollay's 46-page paper, which annotates both books and articles, provides both a source list for teachers and a reading list for students.

Two books which help synthesize American history are Morrison's The Oxford History of the American People and Morris' Encyclopedia of American History.[6] The former is an excellent interpretive history with extensive consideration to art, education, political and social development while the later helps to maintain chronological perspective in identifying events of major significance.

If we are honest with ourselves as teachers, we know that the real measure of our contribution to our students cannot be evaluated by final examination scores. Rather, we should be trying to help our students gain three things through their study of advertising history:

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5 Richard Pollay, "Notes on Sources for the History of Marketing and Advertising in North America." Working Paper No. 434, November 1976, Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration, University of British Columbia.

6 Samuel Eliot Morrison, The Oxford History of the American People. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, and, Richard B. Morris, ed., Encyclopedia of American History. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.

1. an understanding that advertising has developed as an integral institution of society and, as such, has both been influenced by society and has influenced society.

2. an appreciation that advertising is a profession with a significant and honorable developmental record that places it in the same rank as other professions.

3. an awareness that current practices can be understood and explained in light of the historical record, and that future practices will be extensions of the past and present.

Lesser goals may be more easily accomplished in the classroom through an emphasis on names, dates and places or by a quick and casual treatment of advertising history. However, by imparting a full understanding of the development of advertising, both the student and the profession are best served.